

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Original) A communications system for transferring electronic data between users, the system including a host system structured and arranged to receive and deliver messages of various types between users of the communications system, the host system comprising:

an instant messaging network enabling instant messaging communication between users of the communications system, the instant messaging network having the capability to monitor whether a certain user is capable of receiving an instant message at a particular moment;

a mail gateway receiving and delivering e-mail messages to users of the communications system; and

a configuring network in communication with both the instant messaging network and the mail gateway, the configuring network being dedicated to automatically configure instant messaging communication between an intended recipient of an e-mail message and the sender of the e-mail message.

2. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the configuring network comprises a look-up server for associating e-mail addresses with instant messaging screen names.

3. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the configuring network sends a redirection command to the recipient based on the capability of the sender to receive an instant message.

4. (Original) The communications system of claim 3 wherein the redirection command comprises a uniform resource locator.

5. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the configuring network sends a redirection command to the recipient based on the capability of another recipient of the e-mail message to receive an instant message.

6. (Original) The communications system of claim 5 wherein the redirection command comprises a uniform resource locator.

7. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the configuring network establishes a persistent connection to the instant messaging network.

8. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the configuring network checks a control port to confirm whether the sender is capable of receiving an instant message.

9. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the configuring network determines whether an e-mail address is associated with a recognized domain.

10. (Original) The communications system of claim 9 wherein the configuring network strips recognized domains from e-mail addresses.

11. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the configuring network comprises a cache.

12 (Original) The communications system of claim 11 wherein the configuring network detects whether information associated with an e-mail message is stored in the cache.

13. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the mail gateway comprises a send mail server for delivering electronic data to users.

14. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the mail gateway comprises a read mail server for accessing electronic data.

15. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the mail gateway comprises a processing server for processing electronic data.

16. (Original) The communications system of claim 1, wherein the mail gateway is web-based.

17. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the mail gateway is online-service-provider-based.

18. (Original) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the mail gateway is instant-messaging-host-based.

19. (Original) The communications system of claim 1, wherein the instant messaging network is web-based.

20. (Original) The communications system of claim 1, wherein the instant messaging network is online-service-provider-based.

21. (Original) A communications method for transferring electronic data between users of a communications system, the communications system including a host that is structured and arranged to receive and deliver messages of various types between users of the communications system, the method comprising:

enabling instant messaging communication between users of the communications system at an instant messaging network, the instant messaging network having the capability to monitor whether a certain user is capable of receiving an instant message at a particular moment; receiving e-mail messages at a mail gateway; delivering the e-mail messages to users of the communications system; and automatically configuring instant messaging communication between an intended recipient of an e-mail message and the sender of the e-mail message at a configuring network, the configuring network being in communication with both the instant messaging network and the mail gateway.

22. (Original) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising associating e-mail addresses with instant messaging screen names at a look-up server.

23. (Original) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising sending a redirection command from the configuring network to the recipient based on the capability of the sender to receive an instant message.

24. (Original) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising sending a redirection command from the configuring network to the recipient based on the capability of another recipient of the e-mail message to receive an instant message.

25. (Original) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising establishing a persistent connection between the configuring network and the instant messaging network.

26. (Original) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising checking a control port to confirm whether the sender is capable of receiving an instant message.

27. (Original) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising determining whether an e-mail address is associated with a recognized domain.

28. (Original) The communications method of claim 27 further comprising stripping a recognized domain from the e-mail address.

29. (Original) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising determining whether information associated with an e-mail message is stored locally.

30. (Currently Amended) A computer program for transferring electronic data between users of a communications system, the communications system including a host that is structured and arranged to receive and deliver messages of various types between users of the communications system, the computer program being stored on a computer readable medium and comprising instructions for:

~~enable enabling~~ instant messaging communication between users of the communications system at an instant messaging network, the instant messaging network having the capability to monitor whether a certain user is capable of receiving an instant message at a particular moment;

~~receive receiving~~ e-mail messages at a mail gateway;

~~deliver delivering~~ the e-mail messages to users of the communications system; and

automatically ~~configure configuring~~ instant messaging communication between an intended recipient of an e-mail message and the sender of the e-mail message at a configuring network, the configuring network being in communication with both the instant messaging network and the mail gateway.

31. (Original) The computer program of claim 30 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a disc.

32. (Original) The computer program of claim 30 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a propagated signal.

33. (Original) The computer program of claim 30 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a host.

34. (Original) The computer program of claim 30 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a client.

35. (New) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the instant messaging network detects an instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message.

36. (New) The communications system of claim 35 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message includes online.

37. (New) The communications system of claim 35 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message includes offline.

38. (New) The communications system of claim 35 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message is communicated to the intended recipient of the e-mail message.

39. (New) The communications system of claim 38 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message is represented by an icon.

40. (New) The communications system of claim 38 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message is represented by an icon in the e-mail message.

41. (New) The communications system of claim 38 further comprising configuring a menu in response to recipient input reflecting a request to communicate with the sender, wherein options made available to the communication-seeking recipient through the menu differ depending upon the instant messaging state of the sender in the e-mail message.

42. (New) The communications system of claim 41 further comprising configuring an option to communicate to the sender using instant messaging only if the instant messaging state of the sender is online.

43. (New) The communications system of claim 42 wherein configuring an option includes making the option available for selection by the recipient.

44. (New) The communications system of claim 38 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message is reflected through an appearance of the instant messaging sender identifier in a display of the received e-mail message.

45. (New) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the instant messaging network detects an instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message.

46. (New) The communications system of claim 45 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message includes online.

47. (New) The communications system of claim 45 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message includes offline.

48. (New) The communications system of claim 45 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient e-mail message is communicated to the sender of the e-mail message.

49. (New) The communications system of claim 48 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message is represented by an icon.

50. (New) The communications system of claim 48 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message is represented by an icon in the e-mail message.

51. (New) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the configuring network is configured to enable instant messaging communication between multiple intended recipients of an e-mail message and the sender of the e-mail message.

52. (New) The communications system of claim 1 wherein the configuring network is configured to enable instant messaging communication between other intended recipients of the e-mail message and the sender of the e-mail message.

53. (New) The communications system of claim 52 wherein the instant messaging network detects an instant messaging state of the other intended recipients of the e-mail message.

54. (New) The communications system of claim 53 wherein the instant messaging state of the other intended recipients of the e-mail message is made perceivable to the sender of the e-mail message.

55. (New) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising detecting an instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message.

56. (New) The communications method of claim 55 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message includes online.

57. (New) The communications method of claim 55 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message includes offline.

58. (New) The communications method of claim 55 further comprising communicating the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message to the intended recipient of the e-mail message.

59. (New) The communications method of claim 58 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message is represented by an icon.

60. (New) The communications method of claim 58 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message is represented by an icon in the e-mail message.

61. (New) The communications method of claim 58 further comprising configuring a menu in response to recipient input reflecting a request to communicate with the sender, wherein options made available to the communication-seeking recipient through the menu differ depending upon the instant messaging state of the sender in the e-mail message.

62. (New) The communications method of claim 61 further comprising configuring an option to communicate to the sender using instant messaging only if the instant messaging state of the sender is online.

63. (New) The communications method of claim 62 wherein configuring an option includes making the option available for selection by the recipient.

64. (New) The communications method of claim 58 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message is reflected through an appearance of the instant messaging sender identifier in a display of the received e-mail message.

65. (New) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising detecting an instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message.

66. (New) The communications method of claim 65 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message includes online.

67. (New) The communications method of claim 65 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message includes offline.

68. (New) The communications method of claim 65 further comprising communicating the instant messaging state of the intended recipient e-mail message to the sender of the e-mail message.

69. (New) The communications method of claim 68 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message is represented by an icon.

70. (New) The communications method of claim 68 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message is represented by an icon in the e-mail message.

71. (New) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising automatically configuring instant messaging communication between multiple intended recipients of an e-mail message and the sender of the e-mail message.

72. (New) The communications method of claim 21 further comprising automatically configuring instant messaging communication between other intended recipients of the e-mail message and the sender of the e-mail message.

73. (New) The communications method of claim 72 further comprising detecting an instant messaging state of the other intended recipients of the e-mail message.

74. (New) The communications method of claim 73 further comprising enabling perception of the instant messaging state of the other intended recipients of the e-mail message by the sender of the e-mail message.

75. (New) The computer program of claim 30 further comprising instructions for detecting an instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message.

76. (New) The computer program of claim 75 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message includes online.

77. (New) The computer program of claim 75 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message includes offline.

78. (New) The computer program of claim 75 further comprising instructions for communicating the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message to the intended recipient of the e-mail message.

79. (New) The computer program of claim 78 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message is represented by an icon.

80. (New) The computer program of claim 78 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message is represented by an icon in the e-mail message.

81. (New) The computer program of claim 78 further comprising instructions for configuring a menu in response to recipient input reflecting a request to communicate with the

sender, wherein options made available to the communication-seeking recipient through the menu differ depending upon the instant messaging state of the sender in the e-mail message.

82. (New) The computer program of claim 81 further comprising instructions for configuring an option to communicate to the sender using instant messaging only if the instant messaging state of the sender is online.

83. (New) The computer program of claim 82 wherein the instructions for configuring an option include instructions for making the option available for selection by the recipient.

84. (New) The computer program of claim 78 wherein the instant messaging state of the sender of the e-mail message is reflected through an appearance of the instant messaging sender identifier in a display of the received e-mail message.

85. (New) The computer program of claim 30 further comprising instructions for detecting an instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message.

86. (New) The computer program of claim 85 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message includes online.

87. (New) The computer program of claim 85 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message includes offline.

88. (New) The computer program of claim 85 further comprising instructions for communicating the instant messaging state of the intended recipient e-mail message to the sender of the e-mail message.

89. (New) The computer program of claim 88 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message is represented by an icon.

90. (New) The computer program of claim 88 wherein the instant messaging state of the intended recipient of the e-mail message is represented by an icon in the e-mail message.

91. (New) The computer program of claim 30 further comprising instructions for automatically configuring instant messaging communication between multiple intended recipients of an e-mail message and the sender of the e-mail message.

92. (New) The computer program of claim 30 further comprising instructions for automatically configuring instant messaging communication between other intended recipients of the e-mail message and the sender of the e-mail message.

93. (New) The computer program of claim 92 further comprising instructions for detecting an instant messaging state of the other intended recipients of the e-mail message.

94. (New) The computer program of claim 93 further comprising instructions for enabling perception of the instant messaging state of the other intended recipients of the e-mail message by the sender of the e-mail message.